

Gosport Covered Bridge
Gosport
Owen County
Indiana

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Photographs and
Written and Historical data

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Gosport Covered Bridge

HAER IN-39

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| Location: | Spanned the White River at the east end of Gosport, Indiana UTM: 16.529440.4355310 Quad: Gosport, Indiana |
| Date of Construction: | 1870 |
| Present Owner: | Destroyed |
| Significance: | An example of a triple span Smith truss bridge. |
| Historians: | Robert Rosenberg |

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The Gosport Covered Bridge, which links Owen and Monroe Counties by spanning the east fork of the White River, is situated immediately to the east of Gosport, Indiana. An example of a Smith truss construction, the bridge consists of three spans, each 168 feet long. The westernmost span, nearest the town, burned sometime prior to 1949 and was replaced by a double-intersection Pratt (Whipple) through truss. Suspension rods, found in the web of the wooden spans, were probably added after the bridge was erected.

The bridge, built by the Smith Bridge Company of Toledo, was constructed in 1870. Robert W. Smith, the inventor of the Smith patent truss and the founder of the Smith Bridge Company erected several of his bridges throughout the midwest. Smith was born in 1833 in Westchesterton, Ohio and was educated at home. At age 15 he received his only formal education, a six week course in geometry at the local schoolhouse. After working as a carpenter and barn-builder, Smith devised a new type of wooden bridge in 1867 which used a double set of X-bracing without the need for a tension member. Thereafter he made successive improvements on his design. Smith's bridge was economical, efficient and stable, and "at a time when the wood and iron Howe Truss was extremely popular, Smith's bridge received a patent and temporarily reversed the trend to iron."¹

Most often the Smith Bridge Company constructed its own bridges, although occasionally a close associate might contract for the work if it were outside the Midwest region. The components were generally built in the company yards and shipped to prepared sites, but if the site or transportation costs made this impossible, provisions could be made to use local timbers. Standard charges for a complete bridge erected by the Smith Company were:²

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| 100 feet | \$16.00 per foot |
| 125 feet | \$18.00 per foot |
| 150 feet | \$20.00 per foot |
| 200 feet | \$24.00 per foot |

Construction costs were frequently adjusted to accomodate market rates and the exigencies of competitive bidding, but the standard fee for the use of Smith's patented design was \$1.00 to \$1.50 per foot royalty.

The Gosport bridge was finally condemned and closed to all traffic on 14 December 1949 and demolished shortly thereafter. All that remains today are the bridge piers.

Gosport Covered Bridge

Notes

- 1 Richard Sanders Allen, Covered Bridges of the Middle West, p. 21.
- 2 -----Covered Bridges of the Middle West, p. 23.

Bibliography

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Brattleboro, Vermont: Stephen Greene Press, 1970.

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Engineering. American Wooden Bridges. N.Y.: ASCE, 1976.

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